



Department
Sociology
(QwaQwa Campus)

**Study year
of students**
Third year

Credits: 16

Module offered during
Second semester

Lecturers
Dr Elsa Crause
Mr Grey Magaiza

SOS324

Social Research and Practice

Brief description

This module, presented as a third-year research course in Sociology, consists of integrated theory and practice within the service learning component, utilising mostly qualitative social research techniques. Students receive theoretical training and preparation, whereafter the best students engage with selected cooperative businesses in the QwaQwa region. Groups of five students each are introduced to a particular cooperative that they then visit several times. The visits are aimed at gathering in-depth data on the cooperatives and their functioning, while also building bridges between the students and the community. Students develop a holistic understanding of the organisation, its formal and informal structure, successes and limitations. These analyses are discussed comprehensively with members of the cooperatives in action research cycles. The findings are then compiled as research reports and are also presented at a workshop attended by all parties where further action may be planned.

Community partners

Various cooperative businesses in the QwaQwa region that have received funding from the Free State Department of Social Development. Some examples of previously visited cooperatives are: Flagship, Itekeng Sewing Project, Re a Ikana (a cooking and baking club), Sehljaneng Woodworks, Tsheseng Multi-Purpose Centre.

Service sector partners

The Free State Department of Social Development and community development practitioners employed by them.

Service learning component

The workshop and a concluding appreciative learning activity ensure that students are again made aware of the principals of service learning and the outcomes for themselves and the community members.

Outcomes for students

Students have identified the following outcomes:

- What it means to be part of something bigger than themselves.
- Gaining valuable skills.
- A sense of human compassion.
- Stepping outside their comfort zones and taking initiative.
- To be neutral and non-judgemental.
- Improved thinking skills, communication and problem-solving skills and gaining a broader perspective.
- Civic responsibility.

Impact on community

The community members are made aware of positive aspects pertaining to the cooperatives and their environment. Both community members and community development practitioners who work in collaboration with them, are confronted with identified problem areas that, if addressed, could enhance the sustainability of the projects. Possible alternatives are discussed at the workshop and thereafter cooperatives may request that postgraduate students enter in joint action research cycles with a view to growing as an enterprise. The members also develop interpersonal bonds with the students and the University staff who then become included in their supportive social networks.